Every shot counts — the COVID-19 vaccines

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Your health and safety are our top priorities. That's why Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey (Horizon BCBSNJ) encourages you to follow the recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the New Jersey Department of Health to get a Food and Drug Administration (FDA) authorized COVID-19 vaccination. The COVID-19 vaccine is available at no cost to you. The FDA requires extensive testing for safety and effectiveness before vaccines are used. Until the virus is under control, you should continue to avoid people who are sick, social distance, wear a multi-layered mask in public and wash your hands often to avoid spreading infection.

What we know today

As the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted our lives, we searched for the light at the end of the tunnel. With several vaccines now available, that light seems to be just around the corner.

At Horizon BCBSNJ, we want you to have the facts about the vaccines and help remove uncertainty about being vaccinated.

- There are vaccines available to help combat this disease.
- The vaccines are available at no cost to you.
- Vaccination will help create herd immunity.

Protecting yourself and your loved ones

Until enough people become immune to a disease through vaccination or natural infection (called *herd immunity*), it's important to protect yourself and others from the COVID-19 virus.

Remember to:

- Keep social distancing.
- Wear a multi-layered mask.
- Avoid crowds.
- Wash your hands.
- Stay home if you are sick.

Even after getting vaccinated, you will still need to follow these safeguards.

Learn more about how Horizon BCBSNJ is responding to COVID-19.

Vaccines build immunity

For over 200 years, vaccines have been the answer to ending the spread of contagious and deadly diseases like smallpox, polio and measles. To help stop the public health emergency and protect us against COVID-19, pharmaceutical companies around the world are racing to roll out safe, effective vaccines.

How does it work?

Researchers have studied vaccines for decades. They've found that once infected or vaccinated, our bodies recognize parts of the virus, and then can build a response (antibodies) to protect us from the disease. This means that vaccines help our bodies remember how to fight the virus if we're infected in the future.

Understanding herd immunity

Herd immunity is the ultimate goal, right? Yes, but that's achieved only after a large portion of our entire population has been infected or vaccinated. Current estimates are that at least 85% of our population will need to be infected or vaccinated for COVID-19 herd immunity. Since many people have medical conditions that will prevent them from getting the vaccine, it's up to the rest of us to do our part and get vaccinated.

If you've already had a bout with COVID-19, you may be thinking, I don't need to get a vaccine, right? Wrong! Experts do not yet know how long you are protected from getting sick again after recovering from COVID-19. Even if you have already recovered from COVID-19, it is possible — although rare — that you could be infected with the virus again, so when it's your turn, get vaccinated.

When it's your turn, sign up for the vaccine.

How were the vaccines developed so quickly?

Developing and testing of the COVID-19 vaccines follow the same thorough process as every other approved vaccine:

- Testing in large clinical trials
- Rigorous reviews of the data by the FDA
- Independent advisory committees of medical and public health experts

The FDA then granted emergency use authorization to each COVID-19 vaccine once it was determined that each vaccine was safe and effective, and that the known benefits of each vaccine outweighed the known risks.

COVID-19 vaccines go through the same rigorous safety assessment as all vaccines before being authorized for use in the United States by the FDA.

COVID-19 vaccines are being developed quickly because there was already research on similar viruses. In addition, there are new and faster ways to create vaccines. The funding and the worldwide focus also allowed the process to move quickly. The FDA assures that the expedited process does not sacrifice scientific standards, integrity of the review process or safety.

The science behind the vaccines

COVID-19 is one of many different coronaviruses. Long before COVID-19, researchers at the National Institutes of Health studied coronaviruses and ways to protect against them. They focused on one coronavirus "prototype" and created a vaccine for it. The idea was that this vaccine could eventually be changed to fight different coronaviruses, like the one that causes COVID-19.

Using the prototype coronavirus, researchers focused on the spike protein, which is on the surface of coronaviruses. The coronavirus uses these spikes to latch onto cells in our body. Our body makes antibodies to fight against the virus when it sees the spike protein.

The COVID-19 vaccines that are currently available were studied across a population of diverse ages, races and genders.

What to expect after the shot

As with any vaccine introduced into your body, there could be mild side effects, including:

- Soreness at the injection site
- Fever
- Muscle aches
- Fatigue
- Headaches

Tips to help with side effects:

- **Cool it off.** Apply a cool, damp washcloth to the injection site if you feel soreness.
- **Fight a fever.** If your temperature is elevated, drink plenty of fluids and dress lightly.
- **Get some rest.** You might need to take a step back from your regular activities for a day or two until you're feeling well again.
- **OTC medication.** Over-the-counter medication, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen have been effective in reducing the minor aches and pains that may be associated with the vaccine.

Contact your doctor if:

- The injection site becomes more red or sore after 24 hours.
- Your side effects last more than a few days and are worrying you.

Some people may experience mild side effects, but that's a sign the vaccine is working.

Why two doses?

The first two COVID-19 vaccines authorized by the FDA — Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech — both require two doses at the right intervals to achieve the highest possible levels of immunity. A third vaccine, developed by Johnson & Johnson, requires only one dose.

Like many vaccines, getting the required doses is crucial to the vaccine working properly. It's the same with the COVID-19 vaccine. The first shot starts to build immunity; the second shot ensures near maximum protection. By getting both shots, we protect not only ourselves, but those around us.

If you receive one of the two-dose vaccines, schedule your second appointment before leaving the vaccination site. Your second dose must be from the same manufacturer. Remember to ask if you need a second dose. Some vaccines may only need one dose.

The COVID-19 vaccines are proven to be effective against preventing infection from the virus. So when you get vaccinated, you can feel good about it keeping you and your loved ones safe.

SAFE

- Rigorous testing process
- Safe ingredients
- Doesn't contain the live virus
- Minimal side effects

EFFECTIVE

- Effective across different populations
- Get the second dose if required
- Wear a mask even after vaccination

NECESSARY

- Get the vaccine even if previously infected
- Follow **CDC guidelines** to prevent infections

COVID-19 facts, fictions & fakes

In times of crisis, it's not uncommon for some to take advantage of a situation by offering false hope, fake cures and scams. It's important to stay informed and educated about what is out there, what is real, what is fake, and what could cause more damage than help.

Facts about COVID-19

- There is currently no cure for COVID-19, only treatments.
- Vaccines are now available at no cost to you.
- Vitamins, mineral supplements and certain foods cannot cure or prevent COVID-19.
- Antibiotics cannot prevent or treat COVID-19 because it is viral, not bacterial. Antibiotics fight bacterial infections.

Avoiding scams and harmful "cures"

The Internet can be full of misinformation. A quick Internet search will pull up information on cures and treatments for COVID-19 that are not only false, but in some cases, dangerous and deadly.

There are also people ready to scam those who may not know the facts, making phone calls and requesting personal information. Be wary of anyone who may call, text or email you asking for personal information or requesting money.

How to avoid COVID-19 scams

There are ways to stay safe and avoid falling victim to a scam or fake cure.

- Before seeking any treatment to help fight or prevent COVID-19, speak to your doctor.
- Visit the official NJ State **COVID-19 website** to find authorized vaccination sites.
- Visit the **CDC's** website and the **FDA's** resources to get the most up-to-date information on COVID-19.

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